

Public Papers of the Presidents

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HEADLINE: Statement on Signing the National Museum of the American Indian Act

BODY:

I take great pleasure today in signing S. 978, the "National Museum of the American Indian Act." From this point, our Nation will go forward with a new and richer understanding of the heritage, culture, and values of the peoples of the Americans of Indian ancestry.

The National Museum of the American Indian will be dedicated to the collection, preservation, and exhibition of American Indian languages, literature, history, art, anthropology, and culture. Its centerpiece will be the priceless collection of more than a million artifacts now at the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, in New York City, which will be transferred to the Smithsonian Institution. Another facility, the George Gustav Heye Center of the National Museum of the American Indian, will be located in the Old United States Custom House in lower Manhattan. A storage and conservation structure will be built at the Institution's Museum Support Center in Suitland, Maryland. The Act makes ample provision for the loan of exhibits and artifacts to museums, cultural centers, educational institutions, and libraries and encourages such loans to institutions under Indian jurisdiction. Thus, the new Museum will be truly national, indeed, international, in its reach.

S. 978 also codifies policy for returning American Indian and Native Hawaiian human remains and associated funerary objects. The Smithsonian, in consultation and cooperation with traditional Indian religious leaders and tribal officials and Native Hawaiian organizations, will conduct a detailed inventory of the North American Indian and Native Hawaiian human remains and associated funerary objects in its collections. It will attempt to identify the origins of such remains and objects and will notify the appropriate tribes and organizations of its findings.

This has been a difficult and complex issue to address, involving traditional values of American Indian people, the medical and scientific research value of the remains and objects, and the trust responsibilities of the Smithsonian. The process for inventory, identification, notification, and repatriation embodied in S. 978 represents the substantial efforts and goodwill of many people.

I am glad for the opportunity to sign this historic measure and grateful to those whose vision and determination have created this occasion.

George Bush

The White House, November 28, 1989.

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Note: S. 978, approved November 28, was assigned Public Law No.101-185
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